

E-mail You Can't Part With

This is the third part of my File Hygiene trilogy, and the one that I step into gingerly because it deals with managing your E-mail.

My first notion about E-mail is “Why do folks keep E-mails?” The only E-mail messages I keep are those I’m actively dealing with—maybe 30 or so. I move (or download) attachments I need to keep into my computer files and delete the messages. For me, E-mail is more utilitarian than personal.



But some folks keep E-mails for the same reason they keep shoe-boxes of letters from friends and family.

Whatever your reason, if you want to keep your E-mails, here are three things to consider:

First, E-mail is difficult to organize and easily becomes another hiding place for information.



Some E-mails you want to keep are buried in conversation threads that have wandered beyond the original subject because the sender used an older E-mail as a “container” for a new message. The recipe for Aunt Martha’s apple cake could be buried in an E-mail thread whose subject is “Uncle Ned’s Ski Trip to Bayonne.”

Second, some E-mails have attachments that belong in your computer files. Photos of Uncle Ned should go into your Photo folders, and other documents into your document folders that you’ve meticulously organized after you read about “File Hygiene” a couple of months ago.

Third, some E-mails are spam that will quickly overwhelm your In-box if you don’t do something.

If you want to keep your In-box tidy and save the important stuff, here’s what I suggest:

If an E-mail...	Then...	And then...
1. Needs your attention	Either deal with it now or add it to your reminders.	Delete the E-mail after you’ve done what you need to do.
2. Is more than 6 months old that you forgot about because you have too many E-mails in your In-box	Delete the E-mail and tell the sender you lost it.	Undo the delete, answer the E-mail, and promise you’ll be more prompt. See #1.
3. Has an attachment you need to keep	Save the attachment in a Windows or Mac folder. Save photos in your Photos folders.	Delete the E-mail.
4. Is spam that got through your spam filters	Delete the message. Do not order the skin cream or 3-in-1 air compressor—you don’t need them. Check your spam filter.	Think about the money you just saved.
5. Is an important message from Aunt Martha you need to keep	Create an Aunt Martha E-mail folder and move the E-mail into that folder.	Do the same for the other E-mails in your In-box. All of them.

Regarding the last item, if you use an E-mail “client” program like Outlook or Apple Mail, you can “drag-and-drop” the Aunt Martha E-mail from your In-box into your computer folders. In other words, your Aunt Martha folder would simply be a computer folder that contains her E-mails plus other documents related to Aunt Martha. Then you can read about her ski trip whenever you’d like.

Finally, you must regularly **empty your E-mail trash can**. I suggest every month, but that’s up to you.

Computer Guru

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If you need help managing your E-mail, please stop by the PSRC Computer Lab on Tuesdays from 1 to 4 p.m., Wednesdays from 1:30 to 4 p.m., or Friday's from 10 a.m. to noon. I may buy the air compressor if the price is right. I have no use for the skin cream.